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Convention to Combat Desertification

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Item 7 (a) and (b) of the provisional agenda[1]

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

(a) REVIEW OF REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES OF REGIONS OTHER THAN AFRICA, INCLUDING ON THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS, AND ON EXPERIENCE GAINED AND RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

(b) REVIEW OF THE REPORT ON PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN REGIONS OTHER THAN AFRICA

Addendum

COMPILATION OF SUMMARIES OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AND OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES[2]

Note by the secretariat

1. By its decision 4/COP.3, the Conference of the Parties (COP) decided to undertake, at its fourth session, the review of reports on the implementation of affected country Parties of regions other than Africa, including reports on the participatory process and on experiences gained and results achieved in the preparation and implementation of national action programmes.

2. Pursuant to decision 11/COP.1, the secretariat was requested to compile the summaries of reports submitted by affected country Parties and submit the compilation to the Conference of the Parties for consideration and for any action the COP may wish to take. Decision 11/COP.1 also provided procedures and formats for reporting to the COP and required, in particular, a summary of the national reports, not to exceed six pages.

3. The present document contains the summaries of national reports submitted by five country Parties from the Northern Mediterranean Region and five from other affected country Parties. These are: Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Romania.

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[1] ICCD/COP(4)/1.

[2] Reproduced without formal editing.

A summary from the Group of Annex IV Countries report follows. The secretariat will also make this compilation of summaries available on its Web site (www.unccd.int) for wider circulation. The synthesis of these national reports can be found in ICCD/COP(4)/Add.3 (B) and the full regional report in its annex.

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I. NORTHERN MEDITERRANEAN AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

GREECE

In the context of the fight against desertification, Greece signed the Desertification Convention on 14 October 1994 and ratified it on 6 March 1997.

Greece's geographical position and variations in climate and biotypes give a special character to the country's flora, fauna and habitats. Greek flora and fauna are among the richest in Europe. Since ancient times, human action has greatly transformed the natural environment in Greece. As a result of over-exploitation of soil, water and vegetation resources, large areas of the country are threatened by desertification.

During the last years, Greece has made a significant effort to protect its natural environment and adopt a sustainable development model. In this context, Greece has signed and ratified all major international conventions on the environment. The country's participation in the European Union as a full member since 1981, resulted in the integration and implementation in the national law of the legislation produced by the Union's competent services. The European Union's policies and strategies for sustainable development and environmental protection are therefore a part of the nation's development policy. Through the Community Support Frameworks and the Cohesion Fund, many actions and measures regarding sustainability and environmental protection have been funded.

National and Regional Planning will play a crucial role in the fight against desertification in the long term, following the recent passing of a new law on planning and sustainable development.

Regarding the institutional measures taken to implement the Desertification Convention, the following are mentioned:

- The ratification of the Convention;
- The establishment of the National Committee to Combat Desertification (NCCD), its tasks, composition and mode of operation;
- The Committee's activities, which include the preparation of the Greek National Plan for Combating Desertification, of a report on drought in Greece, the organization of two international conferences on desertification, and many actions aiming at the public awareness on desertification and its impacts;
- The financial aid provided by the Greek State to developing countries for the implementation of the Convention;
- The preparation of a national action plan to limit emissions of greenhouse gases.

An extensive participatory process took place during the preparation of the provisional national action plan. A large number of scientists were invited and participated in the relevant work groups; meetings, consultations and exchange of information were a part of the process. Communication with and representation of NGOs was also established.

Following its completion, the provisional GNAP is being presented in public and distributed to ALL stake-holders in order to function as grounds for an extensive dialogue between all parties involved and affected. The outcome of this dialogue will help GNCCD formulate the final edition of the GNAP and push the plan's implementation and incorporation through its official adoption by the government. Local authorities, NGOs and representatives of stakeholders will be asked to participate in preparing Local Action Plans provided for in the GNAP and aiming at its proper implementation. A communication campaign aiming at information dissemination, public awareness and sensitization will be launched as part of the effort to implement the GNAP.

Significant measures have already been taken to help combat desertification, such as:

- The preparation of a National Cadastral Survey, currently under progress;
- Certain measures and actions taken in the sector of the forest resources management, the dealing with forest fires and the effort for reforestation;
- The effort for a rational management of freshwater resources;
- The significant agri-environmental measures under progress in many areas of the country.
- The national and regional plans under preparation;
- Various actions and measures regarding public awareness, capacity-building and education, such as education offered on environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources, advisory services offered to farmers in relation to erosion and environmental protection, and the significant role played by the environmental NGOs;
- The participation of Greece in international meetings of Annex IV signatories to the Convention.

Regarding measures taken or planned within the framework of the GNAP, the report extensively cites on the following:

(a) General measures to prevent and mitigate desertification, namely:

- determination of threatened areas
- Information and awareness of groups involved;
- Implementation and monitoring of the measures to be taken;
- Spatial planning;
- Basic institutional and legislative measures;
- Allocation of financial resources required;
- Selection of pilot areas;
- Restoration of desertified areas;
- Research;
- International cooperation.

(b) Specific measures on certain sectors directly connected to the situation of desertification in Greece, namely:

- Agricultural sector (soil erosion control, conservation of surface water and dealing with drought, implementation of measures);
- Forest sector (protection against illegal land use changes, forest fire control, proper forest management, implementation of measures, research);
- Cattle raising sector (legal, technical, political and educational measures);
- Freshwater resources sector (institutional and irrigation measures, measures regarding urban and industrial water use, measures for increasing water availability, research);
- Social and economic sector (financial, technological, development, demographic, social, legislative, institutional measures, measures on infrastructure and relevant research).

The successful implementation of the GNAP depends mainly on the securing of its funding, the exact amount of which will be assessed in a special study. Sources of finance of the GNAP could be the state budget, E.U. funding, contributions of groups to be benefitted by the measures to be taken and special contributions and donations.

ITALY

The UNCCD has been ratified by the Italian Parliament with the Law n.170 in 1997.

In September 1997, the Italian President of the Council has instituted the National Committee to combat drought and desertification. The Committee has been working on the implementation and the dissemination of knowledge aimed at combating desertification in Italy. Its most important activity has been the involvement of the institutions and the research organizations to coordinate the political action to fight drought and soil degradation and the social, economic, energetic, environmental and cultural aspects of the Mediterranean basin.

In order to implement the UNCCD the Italian Committee has signed several Memoranda of Understanding with different partners: the Food and Agricultural Organization, the Ente Teatrale Italiano, ANPA and Asinara National Park, Fondo Euro-Mediterraneo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, the Committee is supporting the activities of two study centres in areas that are particularly vulnerable to drought and desertification: Matera (Basilicata) and Porto Torres (Sardinia). In cooperation with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Ministry of Environment has launched a campaign for the enhancement of the sustainable development of the Matera Sassi, that is already included in the UNESCO World Heritage List, and represents a significant and innovative example of the rehabilitation of an urban ecosystem, as well as of appropriate use of national resources and harmonious management in a territorial context characterized by long periods of drought and serious processes of erosion and desertification.

The interactions between social and political worlds have been discussed in several meetings, promoted by the National Committee, with national and international experts. We can mention the workshop on the parameters and indicators of Porto Torres (18-20 September 1998), the first and the second meeting of Matera on the European policies to combat desertification (28-29 July 1997, 29-31 October 1998), and finally the meetings that has been organized in Rome last February, the International workshop "Social participation to combat desertification. Assessment, adaptation and design of a pilot implementation scheme for the use of European Awareness Scenario Workshop methodology in the framework of Annex IV countries" (Rome, 14 February 2000), and the workshop "Desertification, climate change, bio-diversity and forest: synergies for an inter-regional agenda between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries" (Rome, 16 February 2000) that has seen the participation of all the countries of the Annex IV, France, European Union, all the countries of the U.M.A. and Egypt.

Some partial but very important answers have started to appear. We appreciate the birth of a new strategy of cooperation. We have seen the promotion of new rules of soil protection, and the Law n.152/99 on waters, recently approved by the Parliament, includes specific activities to combat desertification and drought.

The environmental policies are strictly linked to the energetic, industrial and scientific and technological politics. In Italy the urbanization of new areas and the abandonment of the ancient cities and the territorial settlements contribute to increasing the susceptibility to desertification. This is why we had the need to develop the collaboration between governments, scientific organizations, institutions, local communities and non-governmental organizations to establish common programmes, in particular, in the following fields:

- management of natural resources, soil and water;
- coast protection;
- improvement of compatible agriculture and eco-technique;
- sustainable tourism;
- environmental education and sustainable use of the resources;
- promotion of innovative technologies and unemployment support.

The National Committee has prepared the "First national communication to combat desertification" submitted and approved by the Inter-Ministerial

Committee for the Economic Planning (CIPE) - deliberation n.154/98 -, the National Committee has approved the "Guidelines for the National Programme" and finally the CIPE has approved the "National action programme to combat drought and desertification in Italy" - deliberation n.229/99.

The Government has played its role in the approval of the CIPE deliberation that clearly underlines the different role that the Government and the Regions play in the fight against desertification and drought and foresees the strategic and operative importance of the Regions in the enforcement of the UNCCD with specific programmes at local level.

PORTUGAL

The National Action Programme to Combat Desertification was approved on 17 June 1998, and is the result of a widespread participation by agents involved and interested in the issue of desertification, mainly from the most affected regions, in a total of about 2200 people, in strict compliance with the spirit of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

We are now ready to begin the implementation of the NAP, as key requirements were already satisfied:

- Campaigns to raise public awareness on the issue of the desertification;
- Creation of conditions for a strong participation of public and private entities;
- Integrated interdepartmental and multi-disciplinary cooperation, from the drafting of policies up to the preparation of the implementation of specific actions;
- Creation of a National Committee to Coordinate the NAP and to monitor its implementation;
- Creation of a National Desertification Observatory, working closely with the National Committee, that will make possible the monitoring and the assessment of the programme s implementation.

A National Coordination Group was created in December 1996 to elaborate the NAP, presided by the Focal Point, including experts from eight ministries, several institutions of the civil service, some of the central departments and others from regional services, for a total of about 30 people. This Group was responsible for the preparation of a synthesis document on "Causes and consequences of desertification in Portugal", which was prepared to give to the public a scientific and technical background for discussion.

The public working sessions were held at the regional level with the participation of the media, universities, environmental NGO´s, experts from official departments, teachers from several education levels and individuals concerned with the problem. A Scientific Council was also created to support the National Coordination Group. This Group was composed of 12 experts covering areas such as climate, soil, water, rural development, economy and sociology.

SPAIN

La aplicación de la Convención de las Naciones Unidas de Lucha contra la Desertificación (CLD) en España está integrada en la política ambiental nacional cuyos mayores desafíos a corto plazo se refieren al uso racional y recuperación de la calidad del agua y su entorno, el control de la pérdida de cobertura vegetal (deforestación, incendios forestales) y de suelo productivo (erosión, desertificación) seguidos por la recuperación del medio litoral y la reducción y gestión adecuada de los residuos, así como la conservación y recuperación del gran patrimonio natural.

La política ambiental española está determinada por el compromiso asumido en el marco de la Conferencia de Río (1992) de concretar a nivel nacional el

proceso allí iniciado hacia el "desarrollo sostenible", así como por la integración del medio ambiente en las políticas sectoriales que recoge el V Programa Comunitario en materia de medio ambiente "Hacia el desarrollo sostenible".

Esta política está coordinada por el Ministerio de Medio Ambiente, creado en 1996 agrupando las competencias en esta materia de distintos departamentos ministeriales, y cuyo objetivo es instrumentar una acción coherente y eficaz a nivel estatal concitando un consenso lo más amplio posible, mediante un continuo proceso de información, participación y seguimiento público e institucional a través de los diversos órganos de participación existentes.

El Ministerio de Medio Ambiente está desarrollando una importante labor de planificación a nivel nacional para desarrollar tanto los planes existentes como los nuevos instrumentos de planificación que se están elaborando y ponerlos en marcha, muchos de ellos relacionados con las esferas de actuación señaladas por la Convención de Lucha contra la Desertificación. Estos Planes Nacionales y diferentes Estrategias Sectoriales, conjuntamente considerados, constituyen la Estrategia Nacional de Desarrollo Sostenible.

Como antecedentes de estrategias de lucha contra la desertificación en España anteriores a la CLD, hay que destacar el Proyecto de Lucha contra la Desertificación en el Mediterráneo, Proyecto LUCDEME, puesto en marcha en 1981 tras la Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre la Desertificación de Nairobi (1977), actualmente vigente y desarrollado por la Dirección General de Conservación de la Naturaleza del Ministerio de Medio Ambiente. Es un proyecto destinado a promocionar el conocimiento del proceso de desertificación y las formas de combatirlo. La contribución del Plan Nacional de Investigación y Desarrollo desde su creación en 1981 ha sido fundamental, promoviendo diversas actuaciones orientadas a paliar los efectos de la desertificación y a dar respuesta a las graves consecuencias que la misma produce en los territorios afectados. Asimismo la lucha contra la desertificación ha estado integrada desde la entrada en España en 1986 en la Unión Europea en la estrategia de aplicación de los Fondos Estructurales y de Cohesión de la UE.

La CLD fue firmada por España el 14 de octubre de 1994 y el instrumento de ratificación fue expedido en enero de 1996. La Convención entró en vigor en España el 26 de diciembre de 1996.

El órgano de coordinación nacional (OCN) establecido en principio para la aplicación de la Convención ha estado compuesto por representantes del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores (a través de la Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales y Científicas), del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (a través del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) y del Ministerio de Medio Ambiente (a través de la Dirección General de Conservación de la Naturaleza).

En el marco del procedimiento de elaboración del Programa de Acción Nacional el primer paso consistió en la presentación por parte del Ministerio de Medio Ambiente al Consejo Asesor de Medio Ambiente (órgano consultivo en el que están representados todos los sectores de la sociedad) de un documento de principios, que fue favorablemente informado. Seguidamente se formó un grupo de trabajo, coordinado desde la Dirección General de Conservación de la Naturaleza, para la elaboración de un documento de trabajo del Programa de Acción Nacional (Borrador del PAN). De este grupo forman parte representantes de distintos organismos de la Administración con competencia en las esferas relacionadas con la desertificación y expertos investigadores. El Borrador del PAN ha sido ya elaborado y va a ser sometido a un proceso de debate abierto al conjunto de la sociedad española.

Como está previsto en el Borrador del PAN, para alcanzar una mayor eficacia en la lucha contra la desertificación se considera oportuno instituir un Comité nacional con el compromiso de aplicar la Convención, que se encargue

de la elaboración, coordinación y ejecución del Programa de Acción Nacional y de seguir la evolución del proceso de desertificación en España y en la cuenca del Mediterráneo, y en el que estén representados todas la Administraciones públicas y los diversos sectores con interés directo en la lucha contra la desertificación.

La creación del "Comité Nacional de lucha contra la Desertificación" se ha puesto en marcha recientemente estando prevista próximamente su aprobación mediante un Real Decreto previa deliberación del Consejo de Ministros.

Se trata de un órgano colegiado, participativo y de reflexión al que deben incorporarse los sectores implicados. En concreto formarán parte del Comité representantes de los Ministerios de la Administración General del Estado, de las Comunidades Autónomas afectadas por la desertificación, de la Administración Local, de Organismos e Institutos Nacionales de carácter técnico y de investigación, de asociaciones profesionales agrarias y forestales y de asociaciones no gubernamentales ambientales.

Estas actuaciones constituyen los primeros pasos para crear en España un marco institucional para un control coherente y funcional de la desertificación.

El PAN no puede desarrollarse de otra forma que como parte de la planificación nacional ambiental y de desarrollo económico y social puesto que se parte de una situación caracterizada por el hecho de que la mayor parte de los campos de acción integrados en la lucha contra la desertificación han sido, o están siendo en la actualidad, objeto de atención y planificación por parte tanto de las Administraciones Públicas como de los distintos estamentos de la sociedad.

Partiendo del diagnóstico realizado de la situación en España, en el que se han estudiado las distintas políticas, Estrategias y Planes sectoriales con influencia, tanto positiva como negativa, en la desertificación, se concluye que, en la actualidad, existe un gran número de acciones o medidas que se han venido llevando a cabo en nuestro país, algunas de ellas se vienen realizando desde hace largo tiempo, que, de alguna manera, se pueden considerar relacionadas con la lucha contra la desertificación. Son acciones que surgen en contextos muy diversos, con más o menos relación con los objetivos específicos perseguidos en el Programa. El carácter multisectorial de los recursos suelo y agua aparece como explicación a la dispersión de acciones en el marco de diferentes políticas, desde la agraria a la hidráulica, pasando por la forestal o desde un punto de vista global las políticas de desarrollo rural, desarrollo regional, ambiental, etc.

La coherencia existente entre el PAN y otras estrategias queda establecida en el sentido de que buena parte de las esferas que guardan relación con la lucha contra la desertificación están contempladas en dichas estrategias. A lo largo del desarrollo del PAN se profundizará en este diagnóstico previo realizado y se definirá el papel que debe jugar el propio Programa como catalizador de las medidas relacionadas con el control del proceso desertificador, y que están incluidas (o en su caso proponer su inclusión) en las políticas y planificaciones sectoriales de ellas derivadas. De hecho del proceso de debate del PAN surgirán las propuestas concretas para buscar y promover las sinergias y enfoques complementarios, así como el reconocimiento e integración de los principios de la CLD en los planes ambientales y de desarrollo existentes.

La estrecha relación entre el PAN y el Programa de Acción Regional (PAR) del Anexo IV que está en fase de preparación, queda de manifiesto en la vinculación entre los temas transnacionales identificados como más relevantes para combatir la desertificación en el Mediterráneo norte y las necesidades manifestadas en el PAN en su estado actual, siendo evidente que el trabajo que

en el marco del PAN se está desarrollando en este sentido contribuirá de forma decisiva al desarrollo de las medidas previstas en el PAN.

Como paso previo al debate y aprobación del PAN se ha elaborado un documento de "Directrices del Programa de Acción Nacional contra la Desertificación" que será aprobado próximamente. Cuando se dé por terminado el proceso de debate del PAN entre todos los actores implicados, el PAN será aprobado por el Gobierno.

Del análisis realizado de la legislación sobre medio ambiente y recursos naturales la conclusión más relevante es que, en la actualidad, se está trabajando en la elaboración o modificación de determinadas normativas existentes relacionadas con los sectores más estrechamente vinculados con la lucha contra la desertificación y que, en general, ofrecen aspectos muy positivos en el sentido de la integración en las distintas normativas de los principios de la CLD. En concreto nos referimos al sector agrícola, al sector forestal, al sector ligado a los recursos hídricos y, con un carácter más horizontal puesto que está muy relacionado con los sectores anteriores, a la política de desarrollo rural. Del proceso de debate del PAN se espera la identificación de medidas concretas para la modificación de normativas existentes o elaboración de otras nuevas, bien en el marco de los procesos de cambio en marcha, bien en otros nuevos.

En el proceso de participación en aras de la preparación del PAN se han distinto grados de participación en función de las etapas del procedimiento de elaboración del mismo. Es en la parte referente a la representación de intereses sociales en los distintos grupos y órganos existentes, constituidos y previstos que han participado en el PAND órganos ya existentes como el Consejo Asesor de Medio Ambiente, órgano de trabajo para la elaboración del Borrador del PAN, Comité Nacional de Lucha contra la Desertificación.

En paso siguiente, de acuerdo con los principios de la CLD, así como con la metodología participativa impulsada por el Ministerio de Medio Ambiente en el proceso de elaboración de sus documentos estratégicos, y una vez aprobado el Borrador del PAN y las Directrices del PAN por el propio Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y por el Comité Nacional, es a este someter el Borrador del PAN a un amplio proceso de consulta y debate en el que participen los distintos estamentos implicados, tanto de la Administración General del Estado, Administraciones Autonómicas y Administración Local, como representantes de los sectores implicados de la sociedad civil.

El proceso de consulta y debate previsto se ha estructurado en base a la organización de una serie de mesas y grupos de trabajo sectoriales. De las mesas y grupos de trabajo formarán parte, además de representantes de la administración, representantes del colectivo objeto a investigación, y representantes de diversos colectivos de la sociedad: Asociaciones profesionales agrarias, Asociaciones profesionales forestales, Asociaciones empresariales de carácter general, Asociaciones de defensa de la naturaleza, Sindicatos, Asociaciones de Usuarios y Consumidores, Consejo de la Juventud, Colegios profesionales, Sociedades Científicas, Fundaciones con actividades relacionadas con la desertificación, etc.

Una vez consultados todos ellos, se elaborará el documento definitivo del Programa, para su aprobación por el Gobierno. El seguimiento de la aplicación del Programa de Acción Nacional se encomendará al Comité Nacional de Lucha contra la Desertificación.

Por otro lado, se tiene prevista la difusión, durante el proceso de debate del PAN, del Borrador del mismo en Internet, dentro de la página Web de la desertificación, actualmente en elaboración, incluyendo la posibilidad de remitir sugerencias y propuestas a una dirección de correo electrónico.

Entre las líneas de acción que propone el PAN, se incluye una estrategia de participación y sensibilización pública que contribuirá al éxito en la ejecución del PAN basada en dos líneas principales: la caracterización y promoción del sector español vinculado a la desertificación con el fin de proveer un marco para el desarrollo y proyección de las tecnologías existentes y su aplicación, y la divulgación y sensibilización a la opinión pública de la importancia y magnitud de este problema favoreciendo la difusión de información veraz y rigurosa sobre el proceso. Con ello se obtendrán las actitudes y estados de opinión necesarios para favorecer el control de la desertificación.

El Programa de Acción Nacional, como ya se ha dicho actualmente en estado de Borrador, presenta en la parte dedicada a las propuestas de acción las principales medidas de una política nacional de lucha contra la desertificación, que son: la determinación de las áreas de actuación, la coordinación de políticas y la identificación de una serie de líneas de acción específicas de lucha contra la desertificación.

La determinación de áreas de actuación tiene como objetivo, a través de la aplicación territorial de indicadores de cada uno de los elementos que la CLD señala en el Anexo IV como característicos de la desertificación en el Mediterráneo, la determinación de los espacios físicos y socioeconómicos sobre los que se va a desarrollar la política de lucha contra la desertificación.

La coordinación de políticas se presenta como una pieza clave del Programa de Acción Nacional. Por tratarse la desertificación de un fenómeno de carácter multisectorial y multidisciplinar, que demanda soluciones integradas, dicha coordinación es un requisito esencial para obtener el éxito en la formulación de dichas soluciones, vinculadas a la armonización de intereses, es decir, a la resolución de los conflictos que se plantean en el territorio. Como base de partida en el Borrador del PAN se ha incluido una Identificación Preliminar de acciones a desarrollar en una estrategia integrada de lucha contra la desertificación, estructuradas en los grandes campos de actuación u objetivos generales a conseguir, acordes con las esferas de acción prioritarias indicadas en el artículo 6 del Anexo IV de la CLD. Este conjunto de acciones se pretende que sirva de base para iniciar un debate en el que esta relación de acciones se analice, se detecten ausencias, se estudien sus posibilidades de aplicación, etc.

En lo referente a la asignación de los presupuestos nacionales en apoyo a la aplicación de la Convención, en el Borrador del PAN se establece que el principio básico económico de todos los sectores llamados a implementar el PAN es el de la necesidad de reorientar los presupuestos públicos o privados, hacia la consecución de los objetivos del PAN.

Por último, entre las medidas incluidas en el PAN está prevista la creación de un grupo de trabajo cuyo objetivo es la definición y aplicación de indicadores físicos, biológicos y socioeconómicos de la desertificación, válidos para satisfacer las necesidades planteadas, entre ellas, y de forma destacada, la de evaluar los efectos de la aplicación de las medidas comprendidas en el PAN. El grupo de indicadores debe integrarse en el marco del Sistema Nacional de Indicadores Ambientales, línea de trabajo que se está desarrollando en España en evolución continua, adaptándose al modelo DPSIR (Fuerzas Conductoras-Presión-Estado-Impacto-Respuesta) que han adoptado últimamente diversos organismos como la OCDE, la Comisión de Desarrollo Sostenible de las Naciones Unidas y la Agencia Europea de Medio Ambiente.

TURKEY

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was adopted in Paris on 17 June 1994 and opened for signature there on 14-15 October 1994. The Convention was signed in 1994 in Paris by our Minister, was approved in November 1996 by the Environment Commission of the Turkish Parliament and was

included in the agenda of the General Assembly for ratifying. This Convention was assented with law number: 4340 on 11 February 1998 in the Turkish Parliament. It was published on official journal which number is 23078 on 14 February 1998.

The objectives of this Convention is to combat desertification and mitigate effects of drought in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa, through effective actions at all levels, supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements, in the framework of and integrated approach which is consistent with Agenda 21, with a view to contribution to the achievement of sustainable development in affected areas.

As you already know, Turkey has an important location. It is like a bridge between East and West, both culturally and geographically. Turkey gives importance to the implementation of this Convention both on a national and on a regional basis.

Turkey, being a member state of the Regional Implementation Annex for the North Mediterranean Countries (RIANMC- Spain, Greece, Portugal, Italy), has been participating in Regional Action Programme (RAP) studies.

Turkey is at the crossroads linking Asia, Europe and Africa, with 97 per cent of its total area (777,971 km²) situated in Asia. The Dardanelles and Bosporus straits extend from Europe to Asia and create a natural connection between the basins of the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The country is surrounded by four seas and has a coastline of 8,333 km. The Aegean and Mediterranean shorelines together exceed 4,500 km, while the Black Sea coast stretches 1,700 km, and is shared with Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Ukraine and Russia. The Sea of Marmara constitutes the remainder of Turkey's coastal area.

The geological structure, topography, climate, wildlife, and plant cover are diverse and the country can be divided into four coastal units (the Black, Marmara, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas) and three mountainous areas. Nearly 65 per cent of the land has slopes steeper than 15 per cent in average, even in the coastal areas. Average altitude is 1,132 m and only 10 per cent of the country is less than 200 m above sea level. High mountains are concentrated in central and eastern Anatolia. Earthquakes, some quite powerful, occur mostly along the north Anatolian fault that runs from the Dardanelles Strait through the Eastern Black Sea Mountains, paralleling the Black Sea coast.

Climate affects erosion by rainfall, temperature and wind. The most important of them is rainfall. The structure, quantity and magnitude of rainfall affects erosion in different ways. If there is severe rain for long periods of time, the erosion rate will increase accordingly. The highly varied climate can be harsh (dry or cold), as in central, east and southeast Anatolia. Average annual temperatures can vary from 4-10°C in the central region to 18-20°C on the southern coast. The climate is both temperate, with rain year-round, and subtropical, where summers are dry. Average annual precipitation is 770 mm., and may rise to 2,300 mm in Rize and drop to 324 mm in Kirsehir.

Overall, the country is well-endowed with natural resources, such as lignite, coal, iron, copper, chrome, magnesite, boron, and salt, and more modest amounts of oil and natural gas. Although somewhat unevenly distributed, water is plentiful and offers a ready supply for drinking, irrigation, industrial development, and hydropower generation. Forests cover about 26 per cent of the landmass, but over half the area is degraded and unproductive. Finally, because the country is surrounded by water, fish supplies are diverse, but only 10 per cent have economic value and catches are modest. The mountainous terrain restricts agricultural development; only 26 per cent of the surface area is suitable, and nearly three-quarters of it is prone to erosion. A fourth of the land is suitable for agriculture.

Integration of environmental issues in development is sustained through Five-Year Development Plans and Annual Programs, which are prepared by State Planning Organization. The Five-Year Development Plans, the amendment of all kinds of legislation, that distort the compatibility between economic development and envircnmental protection, and that detain and reduce the impacts of measures are claimed.

In this context, for an effective environmental management, National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) has been prepared. In addition to Development Plan, the NEAP provides a national environmental strategy while indicating Turkey's environmental outlook at upcoming regional and international arena. Broadly speaking, NEAP has four separate goals, improving the quality of life for all involved, enabling total awareness on environmental issues, formation of a management system which involves design, implementation, financing, monitoring, supervision and information technology and finally economical, social and cultural development for all living and their environments.

As endorsed by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development Agenda 21, constitutes an unprecedented commitment by international community to an integrated framework of shared values, objectives, priorities and actions. It also signifies "the beginning of a new global partnership for sustainable development". As a response to obligations of the Agenda 21, a National Agenda 21 is to be prepared which is now being drafted. National Agenda 21 points out important problematic areas in Turkey and gives the full responsibility for their resolution to the central government. Also, further progress is to be achieved by way of preparing and implementing Local Agenda 21's.

The Local Agenda 21 process entails the building of, and reaches a consensus on, a "sustainable community" vision, encompassing long-term, mid-term and short-term goals, and the subsequent preparation of local action plans. Local Agenda 21 formations are carried out by IULA-EMME and are supported by UNDP. Though these studies are at the national level, there will be obligations at the global level.

As requested by the UNCCD, National Action Programme preparations are under way. The NAP will be over viewing the past practices, a sanction in enforcing the realization of the principles of UNCCD and will work towards the integration of new principles into the policy, with special regard to desertification and drought to enable coordination and harmonization. As NAP is not completed, it still does not have a legal status.

II. OTHER AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES

ARMENIA

The natural and climatic conditions in the Armenian plateau have been formed 10-12,000 years ago. The Armenians who populated existing territory since 9-6 centuries BC have been involved in agriculture and cattle-breeding. A distinctly continental climate, aridity of the area, fragmentation of the relief have been forcing the population to fight for the conservation of land resources, to build irrigation and drying systems, to terrace steep slopes in order to prevent land removal, erosion processes and, finally, desertification.

In Armenia, which covers an area of 2974.3 thousand ha, the following natural soil zones are represented: semi-desert (236 thousand ha), dry steppe (242 thousand ha), steppe (797 thousand ha), forest (712 thousand ha) and highland meadow (629 thousand ha), and the rest of the lands of 358.3 ha are represented by mother ores and water surface. The agricultural holdings amount to 46.8 per cent, forests - 11.2 per cent, the rest - 42 per cent.

The major part of the republic's territory is, to a different extent, undergoing desertification processes. However, almost 50 per cent of the lands in the republic are eroded, some 60 per cent of the territory undergo landslide, mudflow and other exogenous processes and some 40 per cent of lands are represented by stony soils, while saline soils amount to 30 thousand ha of lands amount to 30.0 thousand ha.

Land privatization has been started in the republic since 1991 at the decision of the Supreme Council of Armenia. It has been substantially accomplished in 1994. Starting from 1993 the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia participated in the United Nations Inter-state Committee on Development of the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Convention has been signed on behalf of Armenia on 14 October 1994 in Paris and ratified by the National Assembly (Parliament) of Armenia on 2 July 1997. Since 9 September 1997 Armenia is a Party to the Convention.

Pursuant to the Agenda 21, where one of major obligation is the creation of legislative and legal principles for sustainable development, and during the period since independence of Armenia (1991) and change of management system of the whole economic mechanism due to transition to a market economy, a radical review of the whole complex of legislative and legal mechanisms was required.

According to the current RoA Constitution adopted in 1995 the state ensures environmental protection, reproduction and wise use of natural resources.

All the state and sector programmes in Armenia are developed with regard to environmental concerns and rational use of natural resources. All these works are substantially related to the desertification problems and land conservation as the major natural resource. The actions taken are designed with regard to compliance with the republic's obligations on implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Concrete plans and strategies for desertification problems failed to be developed in the republic except for the Cabinet Decision of 7.10.1998 "On Approval of List of Measures for Meeting the Obligations of the Republic of Armenia Proceeding from the UN Convention to Combat Desertification". However, actions on creation of irrigation and drainage systems, forest-protection belts, rehabilitation of saline soils and degraded lands (reclamation) carried out in the country before 1990s lacked a comprehensive approach to resolution of desertification-related issues.

A National Action Programme (NAP) to Combat Desertification in Armenia is presently being formulated. After the ratification of the Convention the RoA Cabinet by its Decision No. 124 has assigned that:

- the responsibility for meeting obligations undertaken by the Republic of Armenia under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification has been entrusted to the Ministry of Nature Protection;

- the Ministry of Nature Protection jointly with the stakeholder ministries and agencies would submit to the RoA Cabinet recommendations on actions for implementation of obligations undertaken by the Republic.

On 7 October 1998 the RoA Cabinet has adopted Decision No. 620 "On Approval of the List of Measures for Meeting the Obligations of the Republic of Armenia Proceeding from the UN Convention to Combat Desertification". According to this decision a Coordination Commission - National Focal Point (NFP) to Combat Desertification has been instituted by Order No. 193 signed by the Minister of Nature Protection on 12 December 1998. 28 persons, including 11 female, are included in the Commission. The Statute of the Commission has

been agreed with all the members of Coordination Commission and approved by Order No. 31 of 25.03.1999 signed by the Minister of Nature Protection.

In accordance with its status the Commission is a consultative and advisory body, which arranges and coordinates development and implementation of programmes proceeding from the RoA obligations under the Convention. The Commission has no independent budget and financial capacity. The following social and economic sectors related to the issues of combating desertification and its consequences are represented in the Commission: nature conservation, agriculture, urban development, social security, economics and finances, justice, education and science, hydrometeorology, geology. Besides, representatives from such structures as the Ministry for Territorial Planning, State Emergency Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. are involved in the Commission.

The Commission has a developed and approved action plan for 1999-2000. The activities are carried out in the following areas:

- improvement of legislative and normative documentation;
- elaboration of strategic issues for combating desertification;
- elaboration of international and scientific technical cooperation issues;
- administrative arrangements for National Action Programme;
- improvement of the role of non-governmental organizations and involvement of broader public in the preparation and implementation of combating desertification, particularly women, youth and students.

No specialized information network is currently available for the Commission. Preparation of NAP would lead to solving the issue of set-up, running and use of database. Existing sector databases related to desertification problems are fragmented, not duly systematized and practically difficult to be used. Data for the preparation of NAP are presently collected and concentrated at the Lands Conservation Division at the Ministry of Nature Protection.

While preparing the NAP to combat desertification in Armenia all the environmental conventions and projects implemented in the country are being taken into account. This would allow to exclude overlapping and uncoordinated actions. Under structural changes of land relations and introduction of new forms of land ownership preparation of the NAP acquires a particular urgency in terms of natural resources conservation and use.

The principles of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification are recognized and integrated in the projects for Food Procurement in Armenia, Water Sector Development in Armenia, Forestry Sector Development in Armenia, etc. where "Environmental Protection" is represented in a special chapter stipulating also environmental limitations. For neighbouring Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey actions to combat desertification envisaged within the framework of NAP preparation would be of great significance in regional aspect.

A preliminary analysis of environmental legislation within the NAP framework identified a necessity for changes and addenda to the exiting legislative, standard and legal instruments, which envisage land holding/land use system reformation, natural resources management, raising of responsibility and concern of local population in regard of land conservation.

Improvement of legislation in the field of land conservation is directed to toughening of existing enforcement measures and to stimulation of implementation of obligatory measures for conservation of land resources by population using economic mechanisms. The NAP framework stipulates legislative instruments to be elaborated or modified.

Pursuant to the RoA Cabinet's decision Cabinet Decision (No. 124 of 02.03.1998) by which the Ministry of Nature Protection was appointed as responsible for implementation of the Convention and further to the Programme for meeting the RoA obligations under the UNCCD (Cabinet Decision No. 620 of 17.10.1998), the Ministry has been carrying out negotiations with different institutions and international organizations for implementation of the Convention in the RoA. In particular, NAP preparation in the RoA has been negotiated with UNCCD, UNEP, UNSO/UNDP and the UNDP Office in Armenia.

Pursuant to the Memorandum on Understanding between the RoA Cabinet (in the person of the Ministry of Nature Protection) and UNEP, UNEP is rendering consultative and financial support for the NAP preparation. Part of the administrative matters are being arranged by the UNDP Office in Armenia.

Environmental protection is integrated in the Armenia's policies and plans, since all the national and sector programmes are prepared with regard to the measures for conservation and rational use of natural resources.

In institutional aspect it is envisaged to distribute the rights and obligations among the national, regional and local authorities, as well as land resources related organizations both at the national and ministerial levels.

Given the necessity of creation educational, training and scientific basis for combating desertification, proposals have already been prepared and submitted to consideration on introduction of special courses on environmental protection, including land conservation into general, education, specialized and scientific and training programmes.

All the above-mentioned activities are in direct relationship with precise monitoring data characterizing different processes. A special part of the NAP related to informatics and monitoring would envisage strict administrative, legal, technical and functional frames for the activity of different management structures. Initiated land mapping and assessment would serve as foundation for long-term monitoring and would enable to purposefully regulate human activity for conservation of land resources.

The Ministry of Nature Protection and the Ministry of Justice according to the RoA Cabinet Decision No. 620 of 07.10.1998 should prepare and submit a concept for National Special Fund for implementation of actions to combat desertification. The major objective of the Fund is to ensure involvement of local structures into implementation of programmes to combat desertification. The Fund's Statute would stipulate the terms for participation of different partners in management and funding of combating desertification.

There is a hope that difficulties related to the initial phase of works and insufficiency of technical equipment would be resolved with the assistance of international and national organizations.

AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan is rich in mineral resources and raw materials. There are oil, gas, non-ferrous and precious metals, construction materials and other mineral resources. Besides, the agricultural sector is well represented in the country. Industrial sector is also sufficiently developed. From the pre-independence period, Azerbaijan inherited from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics a lot of negative economic, environmental and social problems. They are trying to solve these problems in the country. It was evident for the Government of the Azerbaijan Republic that there should be urgent measures undertaken to address the situation of this kind.

In 1998, with the assistance of the World Bank, the first stage of the National Environmental Protection Plan was completed and approved by the

Government of the Azerbaijan Republic. This document contains priority projects and plans aimed at the improvement of the environmental situation in Azerbaijan. In this situation the accession of the Azerbaijan Republic to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification became a milestone for solving the aforementioned tasks. In this context, preparation of the National Environmental Protection Plan would serve as an important impetus to address a number of environmental, economic and social problems.

At present, the plans to privatize industrial enterprises, agricultural sector and land use in general are gaining momentum. In this relation, environmental problems emerge in addition to economic and social ones. For example, there are problems in rational land use, meaning land utilization without a detriment to the soil fertility. In this regard, it was just in time for Azerbaijan to accede to the UNCCD and to start the preparation of the National Action Plan (NAP) to Combat Desertification.

In view of the above, one of the priority problems is to develop NAP to Combat Desertification and to coordinate it with other relevant governmental plans and programmes in order to achieve synergy and maximum payback and effectiveness. A very cumbersome environmental management system was inherited. Irrespective of the fact that the State Committee for Nature Protection in Azerbaijan was established in 1967, other parallel structures responsible for different resources were also functioning.

For recent four years, a lot of very important legislation acts have been adopted in this country. They are the Land, Water and Forest Codes. Apart from it, the Law on Land Reform was adopted - this law has political, economic and social significance. The privatization of land on the basis of this law has been almost completed. Besides, it should be noted that the analysis of existing environmental legislation acts has shown that some of them are out of date and are not working because they do not correspond to the existing state of affairs. For this reason in 1999 a number of environmental laws were adopted, such as Law on Environmental Safety, Law on Conservation of Soil Fertility, which are very important in the context of the provisions of the Convention to Combat Desertification.

In March 1998, a National Workshop to Raise Public Awareness on problems related to combating desertification was held. Representatives from all stakeholder organizations, institutions and enterprises participated in this Workshop. As a result of the Workshop, an address to the Azerbaijan Republic Government was adopted. The result was very efficient - on 24 April 1998, the President of the Azerbaijan Republic signed the Law on Ratification of United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (N487-1G).

At present, the State Committee for Ecology and Nature Utilization Control headed by a Deputy Prime-Minister is a coordinator and responsible for the implementation of all environmental conventions. After the Convention had been ratified, its coordinator as well as an expert commission consisting of representatives of all stakeholder ministries and institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were appointed. Besides, one should note that NGOs have also selected one coordinator who is guiding these organizations' efforts and is working in close contact with National Coordination Body (NCB).

As a result of the National Workshop, increased interest in the problems of desertification was noted. Interest has been displayed by different layers of population - ranging from government representatives to scientists, students and different NGOs. It was a result of the extensive coverage of this Workshop by different mass media. Such public feedback and the participants' address to the Government have had a positive result. All the important decisions adopted by the Conferences of the Parties to the UNCCD, its results and the text of the Convention, other important documents were translated and brought to the attention of the general public.

At present, when preparation of the NAP has just been started in Azerbaijan, but a wide range of stockholders has been already identified. They are government institutions, representatives of academia, different environmental and women's non-governmental organizations. It should be noted, that representatives of different layers of population, including the increased numbers of women and students, are being involved in the process of the UNCCD implementation.

As it was noted above, Azerbaijan's land resources are subject to different kinds of negative phenomena (erosion, salinization, chemical contamination), which are conditioned by both geo-morphological soil features and human activities and lead to land degradation and further desertification. Considering the fact that a great part of economic potential falls on agricultural and industrial sectors, the Government has always paid a great attention to the state of soil, and has been developing partnership agreements with different international agencies and developed countries in. The results of these contacts in the context of support and participation in the NAP remain very low. This state of affairs is influenced by both objective and subjective reasons.

One should note the assistance of the UNDP office in Azerbaijan, which has rendered technical and financial assistance in installing a GIS system.

In the framework of the Caspian Environmental Program (CEP), maps featuring the spread of desertification in the coastal 25-kilometre zone were prepared. This programme is being financed by the World Bank, Tacis program, UNEP and Global Environmental Fund. This year, the Government of Switzerland provided Azerbaijan with financial assistance to start preparation of the NAP. A consultation process on these issues has been started with all stakeholder ministries and institutions as well as with the NGO community.

It should be noted that NCO has cooperated with many international agencies before. This work was especially active during the development of the National Environmental Action Plan, among whose priorities there were some issues directly related to desertification processes. The Government assists in the implementation of the aforementioned problems. In this regard activities of the Agency to Facilitate the Development of Farms (with the support by the World Bank and FAO)should be noted. All the pilot farms that have been established or are being established make use of modern technologies with due consideration of local traditional expertise and mandatory EIA (in order to prevent irrational land utilization).

One cannot say that at the current stage the role of NGOs is significant in this process, because NGOs unify mainly urban population, scientists, intelligentsia, etc. However their role in the process of understanding of practical challenges in combating desertification is increasing. The expertise of rural population is invaluable here - this expertise will definitely be used in further work on the NAP.

The Territory of Azerbaijan - which is one of the most ancient places of emergence and development of humanity and agriculture - has been impacted by human activity. As a result, the desertification process accompanied by erosion and land degradation has been common for ages and intensified in the 20th century. At present, the area of eroded lands is 3.7 million hectares, including 3 million hectares subject to water erosion, about 0.3 million hectares subject to irrigation erosion, about 0.4 million hectares - to wind erosion. Preliminary and very rough estimates show that the area of heavily eroded and practically degraded land of the agricultural fund comes up to 0.7 million hectares and their normative value is not lower than US$1 billion. More than 1.2 million hectares of land are saline, about 30 thousand of hectares of land have been damaged as a result of mining and other technogeneous processes.

For recent five or six years an attitude to environmental problems and related economic and social problems has become more serious. International cooperation has a special role to play. The most effective way of developing international cooperation has been accession to international conventions. For this reason, it is necessary to coordinate the already developed action programs and specific plans with the NAP to combat desertification in order to achieve synergy.

The following priorities in the framework of development and implementation of the NAP are to be identified:

- To establish a National Database on combating desertification;
- To establish an information system, including a geographical information system on combating desertification;
- To prepare an inventory of all territories subject to desertification processes, to assess those processes and to perform qualitative and quantitative analysis of the existing situation;
- To establish and perform monitoring;
- To organize and implement stationary control methods over the processes of desertification;
- To organize and implement remote methods of control and research of processes leading to desertification;
- To organize and implement control over rational utilization on the basis of EIA under the condition of transition to private land ownership and establishment of many small farms;
- To develop state and regional plans, programs to undertake anti-erosion, melioration, irrigation, forest rehabilitation measures;
- To develop systems of social and economic mechanisms and measures to encourage rational nature utilization;
- To develop national programs to rehabilitate occupied territories, as well territories subject to negative environmental pressure as a result of temporary location of refugees and displaced persons;
- To improve and develop necessary legislation and normative acts;
- Public awareness raising on matters of desertification;
- To involve NGOs in activities to combat desertification;
- To cooperate closer with international organizations and to use the experience of developed countries in process of combating desertification;
- To train qualified specialists who will continue the process of combating desertification in the future under the conditions of more negative pressure on the environment.

In the former Soviet Union the Government annually approved the plans of economic and social development, which contained environmental measures. Many of them were directed to combating desertification. They included construction of anti-erosion facilities, planting protective forests, terracing of steep slopes, afforestation of ravines and other unused lands, forest rehabilitation, etc. These activities were funded from the budget. There were no attempts of fund-raising or resource mobilization at the international level. The Swiss Government has allocated funds through the UNCCD secretariat to start activities on the NAP.

It should be noted that there is a Reserve Environmental Fund administered by the Ministry of Finances and the State Committee for Ecology (NCO). This Fund serves to undertake specific environmental activities. The Fund is financed through compensations, fines and payments for environmental pollution. Yet, this Fund has very limited resources. At present the Government directs all funds to the improvement of the situation of refugees and internally displaced (about 1 million people), who live in places with poor conditions. It adds to economic, social and environmental problems.

Under these circumstances, the assistance of donors both international organizations and developed counties would be invaluable. In relation to this,

the development of the NAP a within short time period, and the correct selection of priorities would allow to receive assistance from the aforementioned sources. Such an experience is known to the country. It has reinforced the activity to combat desertification.

At present, there are many requirements in technical cooperation with donors in the areas of awareness raising on modern technologies to combat desertification, training of specialists of needed qualifications, obtaining modern equipment to establish a database and Geographic Information System, obtaining necessary information in Russian language.

For many years, academic institutions and government bodies have been conducting research of the desertification processes and factors causing them. Such institutions as the Institute of Geography, the Institute of Soil Research of the Academy of Sciences, Agro-Environmental Center of the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the State Committee for Ecology and the State Hydrometeorology Committee have been doing environmental monitoring. At present, a normative act on the establishment and conduct of environmental monitoring has been prepared. Considering the fact that different agencies have been dealing with these issues, it is natural that the information available and approaches are different - i.e. there is no common standard. Different institutions depending on the tasks and goals, have used different methodologies, which need to be unified and brought to a common standard. The situation is the same with information in those agencies.

Under these conditions the aforementioned normative act enables one to unify the system of monitoring in general, and in particular relating to combating desertification.

Azerbaijan has just began developing the NAP, there have already been meetings and consultations concerning these matters with stakeholder ministries and organizations, as well as NGOs, for this reason there are no difficulties in information exchange. It has been planned to publish relevant information materials this year.

The UNCCD implementation process has just started in Azerbaijan, but combat against erosion, soil salinization, chemical contamination has never stopped, and though it has been conducted on a small scale, the extent of practical recultivation of land has increased. It is all happening against the background of global economic and social changes, taking place in the Azerbaijan Republic.

However, it is understood that it is not sufficient for practical solution of desertification problems, which in its turn are related to objective and subjective reasons (war, occupation of 20 per cent of the territory and the disturbance of its environmental balance), the existence of 1 million refugees and displaced persons. Irrespective of all that, it is hoped that thanks to the UNCCD secretariat assistance and guidance the countries' efforts will be put on the right track.

GEORGIA

Georgia, small mountainous country[3] at the eastern coast of the Black Sea, signed the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 1994. In 1999, the Parliament of Georgia ratified the Convention, and on 21 October 1999, Georgia became a Party to the UNCCD.

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[3] Population - 5.5 millions, area - 69700 km^2, GDP - 609 USD per capita (1999).

From an economic point of view, currently Georgia represents a typical country with an economy in transition and a set of associated problems. Difficulties are exaggerated with the political disturbances; these plagued the country in early 1990s, shortly after it had restored independence, and catastrophic results have not passed away so far.

The country is still in a stage of rapid development of its legislation. Despite the fact that after adoption of the new Constitution in 1995 and more than 300 new laws of which approximately 50 are directly related to the environmental and relevant fields/environmental protection, natural resources management, land use and agricultural practices - today Georgia's environmental legislation is a confusing mixture of laws and especially regulations/sub-laws and technical standards based on heterogeneous legislative and judicial provisions adopted on the one hand from the legislation of the western countries - especially that of the European Union, and on the other hand from former Soviet legislation. This is one of the main obstacles on the way to integrated sustainable strategy and policy development, implementation and enforcement in Georgia.

Presently, the economy of the country is in such a state, that it is not realistic to expect comprehensive problem solving environmental national investment programs. At the same time, the environmental problems are so huge, that foreign support, as well as domestic investment possibilities, can only stimulate and facilitate a process of economic and institutional reforms. In connection with this it is very important to identify priority directions of the environmental (including desertification issues) institutional and legal system at the early stage of the development. These priorities will be directly related to the sectors of national economy and environment.

At present, the state is poor and the environment is not as valued as it should be. It is difficult to get funds from the state budget for environmental and sustainable natural resources management purposes. There are no central environmental or nature conservation funds, neither on the national nor on the regional and municipal levels. Complete perception of the specific situation in Georgia is necessary in order to work out and implement realistic policies that warrant sustainable development strategy of the country.

The main policy document in Georgia determining the country development strategy in the short term (one year) is "the Indicative Plan for Social and Economic Development", produced annually by the Ministry of Economy. The Indicative Plan for 2000 includes implementation of projects on "Protecting the Soil from Erosion" and "Improving the Soil Fertility" as parts of agricultural sector development programme. However, this document is rather not of the binding character.

The main environmental policy document in Georgia (that should address also problems of desertification) is the National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP), with the 5-year span. The first NEAP, prepared under the auspices of the MENRP, is expected to be approved by the President of Georgia in May 2000. It identifies priority environmental problems in the country and proposes short- and medium-term institutional and regulatory changes and investment actions to address the problems. Numerous ministries, departments, scientific institutions, non-governmental organizations, local and foreign environmental experts contributed to the process of the NEAP development.

Desertification problems are addressed in the section of NEAP devoted to Agricultural Land Use. According to the NEAP "the main environmental problem associated with Georgian agriculture is soil erosion. Soil erosion is caused mainly by poor agricultural practice, such as development of steep slopes; deforestation of mountains; overgrazing; irrigation leading to washing away of topsoil. In recent years practically no means for fighting soil erosion have been deployed since no funds have been available.

Desertification in the eastern part of Georgia has intensified due to overgrazing and climatic changes (reduction of rainfall) in the region. About 3000 ha has been eroded including Shiraki, Eldari, Iori, Taribana, Natbeuri, Naomari, Ole and Jeiran-chel valleys, the ridges, plateau and the major part of the south slope of Kakheti ridge.

Vast areas are salinated. In particular, 59200 ha are strongly salinated, while for 54340 ha salinization is moderate. About 15000 ha of humus-sulfate soils need reclamation."

To alleviate the problems related to soil erosion and desertification the NEAP proposes to enable investment projects and institutional changes. However, these proposals are rather of a general nature.

Over the last three years Georgia has developed environmental sector specific strategies such as "Initial National Communication under UNFCCC" (includes also draft adaptation strategies for expected changes in climate. Adopted in 1999), "Biodiversity Strategy" (development started in 1997), "Forestry Strategy" (development started at 1998). Yet, No sector-specific strategy or action plan for combating desertification has been developed so far in Georgia. With the support of the UNCCD secretariat, the country is initiating its first NAP now.

The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection (MENRP) bears the function of the UNCCD National Coordination Body (NCB) in Georgia (not through formal nomination but due to the general allocation of responsibilities on governmental statutory bodies). Presently, the National Focal Point (NFP) to the UNCCD is the staff member of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, working as the Head of the Division of Environmental Policy. Nevertheless, there is an option to shift formal allocation of NCB functions to the State Coordinating Commission to Combat Desertification in Georgia (SCCCDG) - an intersectoral body that is planned to establish; the final decision on the issue will be taken after the initial consultations in framework of the NAP preparation process.

Due to the overall problems in the country's economy and governmental budget the MENRP funding is quite limited. Material resources and means for communication are not adequate too.

In cooperation with governmental as well as scientific establishments and NGOs, with the support of the UNCCD secretariat, NCB and NFP in 1997-1999 undertook several activities on UNCCD and its importance for Georgia. In 1999, the NFP through the assistance provided by the UNDP/UNSO initiated the network of institutions to combat desertification in Georgia. The network consists of 27 different governmental and non-governmental organizations and academic institutions and is designed to support information and experience exchange between the institutions and to facilitate the decision-making process on policy issues to combat desertification.

Prior to its accession to the UNCCD in 1999, Georgia had developed neither the separate NAP on desertification nor the clear framework for incorporation of desertification-related issues into other general or sector plans. First NAP that Georgia has to develop in 2000 will become the result of improved internal cooperation as well as financial assistance of the UNCCD Secretariat, which allotted funds to assist Georgia in NAP development. On 20 April 2000, first awareness-raising meeting on the upcoming preparation of NAP was held at the MENRP by the initiative of the national Focal Point. About 20 state agencies and scientific institutions attended the meeting. Two days later, the separate meeting was held at the MENRP for NGOs on the same topic.

The NAP will be developed through active involvement of all the stakeholders dealing with the problems of desertification including governmental

departments, academic institutions, NGOs, local governmental bodies of the regions threatened or affected by desertification. On the final stage, governmental approval or parliamentary adoption of NAP will be necessary.

In Georgia draft laws and regulations in the field of environmental protection are routinely published and publicly debated. The new Administrative Code of Georgia (1999) boosted the right of public to have an access to any information (except the information containing state or commercial secret) that is possessed by any governmental institution. The ratification of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters by Georgian Parliament (11.02.2000) made a step further in this direction.

NGOs have been actively involved in the development of various environmental documents. However, the participation of local population is often facing difficulties; local NGOs still lack necessary expertise as well as funding to facilitate the process, while national NGOs mostly didn't manage to develop operational branches outside big towns. Mechanism for effective participation of actors and stakeholders in defining national priorities and participatory process in support of the preparation of the action programme on a whole is not finalized yet. There is no specific document related to a strategy of communication and public awareness on desertification.

Although no special campaign was organized for the desertification issues, the experience of other campaigns demonstrated the way to reach the local population efficiently. Especially the involvement of youth environmental organizations proved to be effective. NGOs have already built the practice of networking on specific sector problems, as well as the mechanisms of nominating and authorizing representatives to certain institutions. These mechanisms will be enacted also in the NAP development process and maintained afterwards.

Local government can be involved through routine governmental channels, as well as through newly emerged (however, still weak) organizations with horizontal linkages (e.g. the Association of Sakrebulos[4]).

It will take significant efforts to keep the level of information exchange with local communities high. First of all, the real understanding and interest to the problem has to be developed locally; practical and pragmatic approaches like, for instance, pilot projects on agricultural practices improvement, could serve as good stimuli for the dissemination of interest in population groups.

There was no commitment taken so far by governments of international partners in regard to involvement in the process of NAP preparation and implementation, because Georgia became a Party to the UNCCD just a few months ago and still has to prepare its first NAP. Nevertheless, the activities of foreign partners in interrelated sectors of Georgian economy (such as biodiversity conservation, land resources management, forestry management, agricultural practice improvement, etc.) indicate the possibility for future expansion of these activities onto desertification-related affairs as well. There is a significant potential for establishment of efficient linkages to the desertification issue within the framework of some ongoing and planned bi- and multilateral projects.

There was no analysis of past experience conducted so far for the evaluation of activities undertaken in the field of combatting desertification. Such activities definitely took place in past, including soviet-time measures

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[4] "Sakrebulo" (literally - "the assembly") - elective board with local governance power in Georgia.

designed to combat land degradation and erosion. These measures were targeting usually quite narrow objectives (e.g. to comply with certain standards on structural development of certain types of arable lands); their implementation was considered as the responsibility of single governmental structure alone (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture) and, for this reason, only regulatory instruments were usually employed. Not surprisingly, the results of such a policy seemed to be at least mixed and their positive effects (if any), being not supported locally, disappeared as soon as the regulatory framework changed in line with fundamental re-structuring of governance system in the 1990s.

Of course, the summarization and evaluation of that experience needs to apply new approaches, in light of the principles of sustainability. One particular conclusion that could be drawn from past lessons is the following: no single institution is able to carry out measures to combat desertification and land degradation successfully. Only joint and integrated efforts could promote sound measures and achieve their targets. Therefore the significant part of NAP preparation will involve local population and governments in affected regions of country.

Most recent effort to assess some of pressing aspects of the issue was undertaken through the development of the First National Communication of Georgia to the UNFCCC in 1999.[5] Identifying the vulnerability of ecosystems and sectors, the Communication suggests some measures to mitigate adverse effects on country economy and environment that will be considered in NAP drafting process.

In international context, bilateral agreements of Georgia with its neighbouring Armenia and Azerbaijan on the protection of environment include clear provisions on cooperation in regard to "sensitive transboundary ecosystems". Both of agreements emphasize the importance of regional collaboration in joining efforts to solve regional and global environmental problems. Yet there are no special actions and measures taken at the subregional and regional levels. Such activity is envisaged to start along with the NAP implementation process.

Therefore, local capacity-building complemented with the transboundary cooperation whenever feasible, should be considered as a vital element of NAP. With the privatization and land tenure reform approaching the final stage, local governments and populations possess more power in natural resources management; unfortunately, this not always implies that the responsibilities are also recognized and acknowledged.

The process of the NAP development can considerably benefit from "overlapping" activities in bordering sectors of environment protection. Nevertheless, consultation and coordination process between three Conventions (UNCCD, UNFCCC and Convention on Biodiversity Conservation) is not formalized and takes place only occasionally.

As for financing, Georgia has very limited sources of internal funding and - unfortunately - even worse lack of adequate management. Revenues from so-called "ecological" taxes that are imposed on the harmful substances emissions/discharges, fuel retail and natural resources use, should be spent on the environment protection; in practice, it never happens. By the way, these revenues are not negligible at all - even with the low collection rate, last year (1999) these three "ecological" taxes raised in total more than 20 millions GEL (more than US$10 million).

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[5] Prepared by the Center on Climate Research of MENRP, under the assistance of GEF-UNDP.

The Government has not determined specific mechanisms to ensure financing for combatting desertification. Moreover, it would be naive to expect that government will allocate sufficient funds from internal resources to combat desertification, even if it had these funds included in budget (e.g., earmarking the revenues from "ecological taxes") - too often in Georgia budget promises fail to turn into something real.

The use of private funds is problematic for several reasons, including the limited capacity of internal private financial institutions, as well as the issue of an important competitor - nation-wide social priorities (salaries and pensions arrears are very high in state-owned sector).

Local offices of UNDP, WB, TACIS, USAID, etc, as well as bilateral donors (Governments of France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, UK, others) provide very important source of external special funding for environment; yet their availability for locals (outside big towns) is still low, and requirements for project design are higher than the local capacity in most areas and districts.

The UNCCD secretariat contributed US$35,000 for the process of the preparation of first Georgian NAP. Internal sources of the MENRP and other institutions can also be mobilized, but these will almost entirely come as in-kind contribution (space, facilities, etc.) as budgetary funds are extremely limited.

Although information systems on desertification at the national level do not exist, several agencies (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture and Food, State department of Statistics, etc.) collect data that could be used for relevant indicators, if these indicators would in turn exist. The problem is that even the data that was gathered is not properly used. Raw data is of no use for decision-making, and there is no mechanism for data processing to transform it into an useful information. An access to information is also troublesome for main actors, as the data is dispersed and often not communicated to other agencies at all, or subjected to "payments for services".

Again, it is the NAP on combat desertification that should address these issues first time in Georgia. With the assistance of UNCCD secretariat and partner countries, and with the motivation and commitment from the NCB and NFP along with other actors, the NAP is expected not to fail expectations.

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The Republic of Moldova is a small (33.8 thousand sq. km) and densely populated (129 men/sq. km) country, situated between west border of the Ukraine and east border of Romania. The agricultural sector predominating causes high dependence of the Moldova economy upon weather-climate conditions. In combination with human induced factors droughts rate increase in the areas with natural precipitations deficiency leads to the soils degradation - desertification.

The main document, defining aims, priorities and basic directions of sustainable country development, is "Strategical reference points of socio-economic development of Moldova up to 2005", approved by the Government Enactment (1998). Integration of ecological requirements into sectoral policy and forming of the ecological consciousness at all levels are called as one of the strategical priorities. The Government developed project of National Strategy of Sustainable Development "Moldova-21" (1999).

To the main negative factors, influencing national safety of the country, the Strategy attributes the following: reduced financial possibilities of selection and implementation of the above strategy; real economic depression and ineffective natural resources utilization management; political instability; investments deficit; shadow economy at scale.

The first strategical document in the nature protection area was the Long-term Complex Environment Protection and Rational Nature Resources Utilization Programme up to 2005 (1987). Among its major priorities it is necessary to note maintenance of the soils fertility by implementation of the hydrotechnical anti-erosion measures, eroded lands fertility rehabilitation, forest amelioration measures, anchoring and rehabilitation of the landslides.

As milestones in nature protection planning and forecasting are the National Strategical Programme (1996) and the National Action Plan (1997) in the field of the environment protection, elaborated and adopted in accordance with resolutions of the Conference held in Rio de Janeiro with financial support of the World Bank.

The Ministry of Environment and Territory Development is a body authorized to be engaged in the nature protection activity on behalf of the Government. It is responsible for the implementation of relevant United Nations conventions. The UNCCD implementation is coordinated by the National Commission to Combat Desertification (NC), set up in 2000, which is attached to the above Ministry. In its activity NC is guided by the mandate on the UNCCD implementation, approved in March 2000 by the Minister of the Environment and Territory Development. The NC organized translation of the text of the UNCCD in Romanian, some UNCCD materials were translated from English to Romanian and their adapted to Moldova conditions version was published in popular version.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova promotes the creation of necessary institutional, organizational and legal frames to fulfil the UNCCD requirements. The Ministry of Economy and Reforms informed districts administration about main NAP elements and defined main terms of its implementation.

On the whole in Moldova there are more than 20 legislative enactments in the field of environment protection and nature resources utilization. All of them represent basic state strategy in the above area, but they do not exceed the frames of so called "administrative regulating instruments" or "regulating for command and control ". As recent years experience shows, it is necessary to supplement present legislation with normative economy enactments. In this respect there are already some developed and approved legislative enactments, directed to the coming into force of the principle "Polluter pays".

Existing legislation envisages population information and it's participation in decision-making in the field of environmental protection. Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and other laws envisage the right of population to access to information and to healthy environment. The Republic of Moldova was the first state, which ratified Information Access, Public Participation in the Adoption of Environment Issues Resolutions Convention (Orhus, Denmark, 1998).

Process of decentralizing central bodies responsibilities including nature protection goes is continuing with the aim to expand responsibilities of the local bodies. Local public bodies have the following rights and obligations: approvements of the local nature resources utilization limits; supervision and control in the field of utilization and regeneration of the nature resources; authorization of the nature resources utilization; development and implementation of measures to protect or regenerate nature resources; taking stock of the nature resources.

At present in the Republic of Moldova, mainly in the towns function more than 200 non-governmental ecological organizations (NGOs) and their branches, actively participating in environment protection, including combat against desertification. Most of them aim at the resolving of different environment protection problems, but only few contribute to the implementation of practical steps to combat desertification.

The main tasks of NAP to combat desertification induced by drought are the following:

- creation on the whole Republic's territory of a green ecological frame of forest belts and bushes for amelioration of hydrological and hydrothermical agricultural lands regimes;
- development of norms and terms of agricultural crops irrigation depending on hydrothermical regime of territory;
- introducing into the crop rotation drought resistant ones (esparcet, winter wheat, sorghum for the grain, Sudan grass, Italian raigrass, winter barley);
- substantiation of rational nature resources utilization, directed towards stabilization of the landscapes ecological balance in the presence of droughty climate;
- setting up the regional drought monitoring in the frames of National Hydrometeorological Service and development of rational agroclimate potential usage depending on desertification processes;
- minimization of drought consequences by forecasting and planning measures for mitigation of their effects on human induced and natural ecosystems.

Among planned measures it is envisaged improvement of institutional and legal base; development and implementation of socio-economic and demographical regional strategies, local action plans for the areas severely affected by droughts and desertification; development of methods for assessment of desertification levels and registration of the drought affected territory perimeters; development and implementation of measures to prevent and combat droughts and various forms of soils and ecosystems degradation; implementation of the economic and legal mechanisms system for regulation and stimulation measures for minimizing desertification consequences and combating it; implementation of the sustainable agriculture system; inventory keeping, monitoring and implementation of measures to prevent and combat landslides.

The Republic of Moldova is a party of Danube Convention and from 1993 to 1999 it implemented Subregional Programme in the framework of the above Convention partially linked with desertification prevention issues. NAP implementation is supposed to take ten years. Major priority measures are oriented at restoring ecological balance of the territories, subjected to desertification processes.

The total costs of activities outlined by the Action Plan are estimated at 568 mln.lei. Measures for ecological rehabilitation of soils and managing agricultural production from the position of sustainability require considerable funds (almost 50 per cent of the total sum for the former and 47 per cent for the latter). The sources of financing are: budget allocations - 2.7 per cent of total cost; own means of economic subjects - 93; contributions by foreign financial institutions, different donors, including foreign ones - 3.6 per cent, extra budgetary funds - 0.7 per cent.

Environment status data and trends of its changing are contained in the following documents: annual environment quality reports, developed by Ministry of the Environment and Territory Development; annual reports on the population health and hygiene status, developed by Ministry of Public Health; periodic field reports on the status of some nature elements such as: land resources (soils), water quality, forest resources, etc; data of the Department for Statistical and Sociological Studies on toxic waste, investments into environment protection.

Due to economical problems present methodology and technology, level of laboratories equipment in the institutional frames do not conform to the international standard. In the conditions of the Republic of Moldova at national level methodology of complex monitoring of the processes of desertification combat is being developed, including: solving the problem of ecological

monitoring, based on decentralization of functions and setting up desertification monitoring subsystem; methodical provision of the monitoring - National Ecological Institute, Academy of Sciences; technical provision of monitoring - Ministry of Environment and Territory Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Processing Industry, Ministry of Transport and Communication; creation of material base, monitoring data collection and processing - competent ministries; data integration, processing, coordination of actions in this field.

ROMANIA

The accession of Romania to the Convention to Combat Desertification is considered a positive step for the progress of the Romanian economy, conservation of the environmental resources in Romania and integration into international community. Romania has a rich experience in desertification and drought control, reality supported by the achievements acquired in scientific and technical plans, which demonstrates the ability of the Romanian specialists in working out the difficult problems of desertification. Nevertheless, financial resources for transposing into practice the experience accumulated in this field are not available.

The present report emphasizes the need of major and drastic interventions, with extension in the southern, southeastern, eastern and central parts of Romania, in order to obtain real results in desertification control. Consequently, Romania is looking for internal and external (as assistance) financing sources, essential to this action.

Geographical and climatic characteristics of Romania, with special reference to drought processes are shown in Annex 2 of the National Report. Characteristic for Romania's climate is the high frequency of droughts, particularly in the low lands of the South, South-East and East of Romania where the annual mean temperature is between 10.5 and 11.3 0C (sometimes 12.5 - 12.7 0C) and rainfall is bellow 500mm/ per year (sometimes 250 - 300mm). These climatic parameters worsened during the period 1982-1994, this being the most droughty period from the history of the country.

Regarding desertification, this systemic phenomena is a result of drought, among many others. According to the definition of Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), about 2.2 million ha (10 per cent of country area) situated in the South-East of Romania (East of Muntenia, Dobrogea, and the South of Moldova) and consisting mostly of crop fields and a great surface of humid land in the Danube Delta, have less than 0.65 ratio between precipitation and evapotranspiration.

According to Palfay index (PI of 6….8) used today to characterize the dry regions, a region is considered dry if PI is higher than 6. Moreover, in the range 6….8, PI indicates regions easy affected by drought, where the frequency of dry years is 40-65 per cent. In the regions with PI less than 6 there is a lower frequency of dry years. The zones with PI in the range 6...8 (see the map in the Report) cover 40 per cent of the crop land of Romania, namely in the South, South-East and East of Romania. The regions with the PI in the range 4…6 represent 20 per cent of the crop land of Romania situated not only in the South and South-East of Romania but also in the West and the Central part of the country. The degradation process of the soil affects more than half of the land at national level (Annex 3 of the Report), and the most seriously degraded soils (surface erosion, deep erosion, landslides, wind erosion) represent about 7.262 million ha (30.6 per cent).

The region with the highest per cent of degraded soil and land slides phenomena is situated in the Moldavian Plateau, Subcarpati (between the valley of Trotus and Olt), Getic Plateau and Transilvanian Plateau, i.e. in the East, South and Central - North-Eastern part of the country.

Wind erosion is occurring in the far North-West of the country (Carei Plain), West (Banat Plain), South (Oltenia and Baragan Plains), South-East (Black Sea shore, Danube Delta) and East (Tecuci Plain). The crop fields under aridization are located in the South-East of Romania, just in the area with wind erosion (Dolj, Olt, Ialomita, Brăila, Galati counties).

The project "Development of rural areas in Romania - The Green Book" funded by PHARE and having as beneficiary the Ministry of Alimentation and Agriculture in Romania, analysed the rural area with the purpose of identifying the village problems and defining a strategy of rural development. The result of the project was preparation of a map on the degree of rural development in Romania, according to certain risk factors, as follows: geographic, demographic, economic, settlement, technical equipment of the localities, social and ecological ones. At the national level this shows that those communities affected by drought and aridization have a lot of difficulties in their development. These zones need large support and quick intervention to avoid implacable deterioration of them.

Taking into account this state of the things, in Romania all actions that try to reduce the effect of drought and aridization are part of the national and sectorial strategies. Chapter (iii) of the Report enumerates briefly national strategies that contain topics related to the objectives of UNCCD:

- Middle-term National Strategy for Economical Development of Romania;
- National Strategy for Sustainable Development;
- National Plan for Agriculture and Rural Development;
- National Action Program for Environmental Protection;
- Draft Strategy for Drought and Desertification Combat.

The common topics of these strategies are referring to:

- Establishment of optimal size and economically efficient exploitation and development of the structural reforms with the purpose of farms consolidation;
- Priority for security against natural disasters and accidents: drought, floods, landslides. In this field it is mentioned the exploitation of existing construction;
- Strategy actions for sustainable management of forests, a finding of the fact that in Romania the consequences of natural disaster and climatic changes take proportions, so that the necessity of forest management under risk becomes clear;
- Sustainable management of water resources according to international rules;
- Building of financial tools for items connected to the environment, to set gradually the EU "aquis" in the area of water, environment protection in industry, agriculture, soil protection and degraded land.

As a first measure of UNCCD implementation is the creation of Romanian National Committee for Desertification. It will be in charge of elaboration of national strategy and projects for desertification combat and drought prevention, updating of the strategy, monitoring and prognosis of soil quality in the zone subject to desertification, elaboration of project proposals for new law initiatives, identification of financial resources, mediatization of desertification and drought problems to aware the people and international community.

A draft Strategy to combat desertification and drought in Romania in the middle term (2000-2010) has been worked out. It is under the analysis of the institutions and ministries directly concerned and it will be finalized in the second quarter of year 2000. In addition, the actual legislation in Romania, adopted during the last 10 years, refers to aspects of protection and improvement of water and soil resources that, implicitly, tackle elements of

combating desertification and soil degradation: Land Law No. 18/1991; Law on Land Reclamation No. 84/1996; Law on Environmental Protection No. 137/1995; Law on Cadastre No. 7/1996; Forestry Code No. 26/1996; Law of Water No. 107/1996; Law on the Reclamation of Degraded Lands by Afforestation No 107/1999, Governmental Ordinance concerning the Association of Water Users for Irrigations No. 147/1999, Governmental Ordinance concerning the Establishment of the National Company "Land Reclamation" No. 23/2000.

The above legal instruments need to be improved. They must be better connected to each other and must be adapted to EU legislation and international standards.

The main institutions involved in combating desertification, protection and reclamation of degraded lands and drought prevention activities are: Ministry of Waters, Forests and Environmental Protection (MWFEP); research institutes subordinated to MWFEP, oriented on meteorology, hydrology, environmental engineering, forestry, Danube Delta; districtual agencies of environmental protection; Forest National Company; Ministry of Alimentation and Agriculture (MAA); "Gheorghe Ionescu Sisesti " Agriculture and Forestry Academy of Science and its all research institutes; Autonomous Company of Land Improvement; regional specialized institutes subordinated to the Ministry of Alimentation and Agriculture; offices of cadastre and land organization, etc.; NGOs and professional associations (like National Soil Science Society, "Progresul silvic" Society and Romanian Society for Sustainable Development). Local institutions (Forest Branches, district Agencies of Environmental Protection, district offices of Pedological and Agrochemical Studies, Bureau of Cadastre and Land Organization) together with the district branches of National Agency of Agricultural Consultancy (subordinated to the Ministry of Alimentation and Agriculture) and the specialists from Regional Agricultural Research Stations (subordinated to Agriculture and Forestry Academy of Science) are providing the information to the final users and also they ensure the expertise for combat and mitigation of long lasting drought and aridization phenomena.

Regarding international cooperation (chapter vi of the Report), it is considered that under specific geographical, social and economical conditions of Romania, the actions to combat desertification and drought must be developed together with land reclamation and watershed management (mostly in the hilly and mountains area). Chapter vii of the Report describes the actions that have been taken or will be taken to improve the economic environment, institutional organizations, expertise concerning desertification and monitoring of drought consequences (research, forestry, hydrological reclamation). Evolution of the funds of Ecological Restoration Programme of degraded lands by forestation for the period 2001-2050 is shown in chapter vii. In the structure of the current year budget (2000) the allocated funds rise to $450,000 as funds for degraded land improvement and $5,000,000 for reforestation of degraded lands. Romania will contribute yearly TO the SAPARD Program $75,000,000. About 20 per cent of this amount will be allocated to rural communities in the area affected by drought and aridization.

Operative actions are undertaken to monitor and forecast the meteorological and hydrological events as well as the soil quality within the areas affected by desertification and drought. Also, the forests and forestry soils have been monitored since 1990 both within an European and a national survey network (chapter ix).

III. GROUP OF ANNEX IV COUNTRIES

The Mediterranean basin is a region that has been inhabited for thousands of years by numerous cultures and civilizations. These have left an indelible mark on the environment and the landscape. In this region the recognition of the role of human action on desertification processes done by the United Nations

Convention to Combat Drought and Desertification (UNCCD) has been a major step forward in selecting policies and measures.

It is estimated that in the northern Mediterranean area, land degradation affects 99.4 million ha, corresponding to 32 per cent of the territory with arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid climate. This appraisal shows that land degradation has reached alarming levels in the northern Mediterranean region.

Within this framework, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey have agreed to coordinate their action by creating a regional annex of the Northern Mediterranean which is the fourth regional implementation Annex of the UNCCD.

National Programmes to combat drought and desertification have already been presented by Portugal and Italy, while Spain has presented related guidelines. Greece has published and distributed to the public its provisional action plan. Turkey is still drawing up its programme.

Annex activities are coordinated by an interministerial committee that has set in motion a permanent mechanism for consultations among northern Mediterranean countries on the subject of efforts to combat degradation and desertification.

The group of countries of the Northern Mediterranean annex countries have worked during previous sessions of the Conference of the Parties and have been organized into single-theme workshops to identify some priorities in preparation for the Regional Action Programme contemplated by the UNCCD. Priorities have been discussed, integrated and approved by National Committees and by the NGOs of the Northern Mediterranean region. The drawing up of a Regional Action Programme based on these priorities is a joint undertaking of countries that sets out to raise awareness of the phenomenon and involve as many social actors as possible in the implementation of the UNCCD as well as the General Directorates of the European Commission in desertification-related problems.

The uniqueness of this region has been acknowledged and emphasized by international treaties and agreements, such as the Barcelona Convention of 1976 and the Barcelona Declaration of 1995 underpinning the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. These agreements have been laying the foundations, through specific plans of action, for the creation of a context to promote trade/exchanges and the development of all countries in the region.

At an interregional level, Annex IV countries aim to coordinate their actions and create synergies between regional and subregional programmes and other international programmes such as the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the Short- and Medium-Term Priority Environmental Action Programme (SMAP) and the Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Programme (METAP) existing already in the area.

The international scientific community is actively involved in efforts to seek effective solutions to prevent and alleviate desertification-related problems in the Mediterranean area, through international organizations such as UNEP, FAO and the European Commission. EU research and development programmes in particular provide the context in which scientific projects and collaboration are effected among northern Mediterranean countries. The main issues tackled have been the study of indicators, management of water, soil erosion, climate change and traditional technologies.

Future developments for the Annex IV group will consider the extension to other affected country Parties of the Northern Mediterranean region, continuing efforts to elaborate common projects on indicators, pilot areas, the sharing of information through a Clearing House Mechanism and the development of all possible synergies with other conventions and with North African countries.

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